

White Man's Burden: why the west's efforts to aid the rest have done so much ill and so little good

—William Easterly, Excerpt, Pp. 330-332

Nation-Building in the Americas

A previous incarnation of the utopian internationalism of the cold war was the American effort to stabilize unruly republics in the Americas. The United States did direct military interventions in Mexico, the Caribbean, and Central America to spread democracy and free markets in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. After bombarding Veracruz during the Mexican Revolution in 1916, Woodrow Wilson said, “The United States had gone to Mexico to serve mankind.”

Haiti is again illustrative. Chapter 4 discusses how the legacy of slavery left a toxic division between mulattoes and blacks in Haiti, forever destabilizing Haitian politics. Throughout the nineteenth century, the two factions called on foreign intervention to help them defeat their rivals. Americans, British, and Germans were often eager to intervene anyway to protect the business interests of their citizens. Historian Hans Schmidt noted, “US Navy ships visited Haitian ports to ‘protect American lives and property’ in 1857, 1859, 1868, 1869, 1876, 1888, 1889, 1892, 1902, 1903, 1904, 1905, 1906, 1907, 1908, 1909, 1911, 1912, 1913.

Finally, tired of all those round trips, the U.S. occupied Haiti from 1915 to 1934. Haiti's second colonial masters, according to Gendarmerie Commandant Smedley Butler, were “trustees of a huge estate.... the Haitians were our wards and that we were endeavoring to develop and make for them a rich and productive property.” This patronizing attitude was only rarely contradicted, for example by the American journalist who pointed out that the Haitian mulatto elite was “so many layers in culture above the army or navy man and his wife that the visiting American must feel ashamed of his country's representatives.” But Haitian united again in resistance against the foreign invaders, and the Americans left in 1934.

The Americans left behind a newly trained Haitian army, the Garde, with black soldiers and mostly mulatto officers. Mulattoes dominated political office until 1946, when the black majority of the Garde revolted with a new vision of black pride and power, the *noirist* movement. After further political instability, a leading *noirist*, Francois Duvalier, defeated his mulatto opponent in the elections of 1957. Papa Doc Duvalier would rule until his death, in 1971, after which his son Baby Doc ruled until 1986.

After the fall of the Duvalier family, a mixture of military regimes tried to stave off the coming to power of the populist Jean-Bertrand Aristide, who was finally elected president in 1990. Another U.S. military intervention in 1994 restored Aristide to power after a coup. The second U.S. occupation of Haiti was less ambitious than the first, obsessed above all else with avoiding American casualties. The writer Bob Shacochis pointed out the novelty of an invasion to protect the invading soldiers from those they were invading.

After the United States spent two billion dollars to restore Aristide to power, U.S. support weakened in Aristide's democratically challenged second term. Aristide government ministers diverted aid money into corrupt taking, as had their many predecessors. The World Bank in 2002 ranked Haiti as the world's second most corrupt country out of 195 countries rated. After an armed rebellion in February 2004, Aristide took the traditional Haitian path into exile.

Aristide's jet had barely disappeared over the horizon when the World Bank convened a meeting of donors. The Bank announced "a joint government/multi-donor Interim Cooperation Framework (Cadre de Coopération Intèrimaire, or CCI). In July 2004, the CCI believed that Haiti was now "primed to tackle many urgent and medium term development needs." *The Economist* in June 2005 quoted people a little closer to reality, such as diplomats stationed in Port-au-Prince, as saying that Haiti was on the verge of being a "failed state." *Foreign Policy* magazine in August 2005 classified Haiti as a failed state, ranking it as more dysfunctional than the likes of Afghanistan, North Korea, and Zimbabwe. The long years of military intervention have failed to produce anything constructive in Haiti.

As far as promoting democracy, one study on the historical record of American nation-building says that it doesn't usually work. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace scholars Minxin Pei and Sara Kasper analyzed sixteen American nation-building efforts over the past century. Only four were democracies ten years after the U.S. military left—Japan and Germany after resounding defeat and occupation in World War II, and tiny Grenada (1983) and Panama (1989). Besides those already mentioned, the long list of twentieth-century intervention disasters includes Cuba (1898-1902), 1906-1909, 1917-1922), the Dominican Republic (1916-19-24, 1965-1966), Nicaragua (1909-1933), and Panama 1903-1936).